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**District Health Reports West Nile Virus Stats from 2004:**  
**Fish and Game to Handle Dead Bird Collection**

A mild winter, a wet spring, and several positive cases of West Nile virus (WNV) in humans and animals in 2004 have South Central District Health gearing up to monitor the spread of West Nile virus again this summer. Based on what other states have experienced, South Central District Health epidemiologist Karin Frodin, R.N., predicts Idaho will see more human cases of the virus this year.

“When we see an increase in the number of cases of West Nile virus in the animal population like we did in 2004, we can expect to see a jump in the number of cases in humans during the following year,” said Karin Frodin, RN, epidemiologist with South Central District Health. “West Nile virus was discovered in 11 of Idaho’s 44 counties in 2004; six of those counties were in our district. Idaho had several cases of WNV in humans, horses, and birds last year, and evidence from other states suggests that we will see a spike in the number of human cases this year. This spring and summer, people should be careful to protect themselves against mosquito bites and reduce mosquito breeding habitat.”

Frodin said that South Central District Health will be setting mosquito traps in four locations around the Magic, Wood River, and Hagerman valleys this year. Sampling for mosquitoes will begin in early June.

“In order to test for WNV, mosquitoes are trapped using special carbon dioxide traps,” said Frodin. “Mosquitoes are then identified as to what type they are and sent to the Idaho State Laboratory for testing.”

Frodin also announced that the dead bird collection procedure is changing this year. All dead birds to be tested and calls concerning dead birds are to go directly to the local Fish and Game office in Jerome. South Central District Health and all other District Health offices across the state will no longer be collecting dead birds for testing. The Jerome office of Fish and Game may be reached at 324-4359.

Last year in Idaho, 68 human samples were tested for West Nile virus between April and December 2004 at the Idaho State Laboratory. There were three locally acquired non-fatal cases of WNV and one non-fatal case of the disease that was acquired outside of Idaho.

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One of the first cases of West Nile virus was discovered in a Gooding County resident. The man, in his 50s, recovered completely.

“There is no vaccine for humans at this time and the virus is not passed from person to person,” said Frodin. “Prevention is the best protection.”

Also in 2004, 64 Idaho horses were tested by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. Twenty-two horses had locally-acquired cases of the virus; 15 of the 22 horses were unvaccinated or improperly vaccinated against West Nile virus; and 7 of those 15 horses (43.7%) died or were euthanized due to the severity of their symptoms. Of the 22 total reported equine cases in Idaho, there were eight cases in Gooding County; four in Twin Falls County; two each in Lincoln and Minidoka counties; and one case each in Cassia and Jerome counties. Horses should be vaccinated for West Nile virus and veterinarians are recommending that horse owners vaccinate their animals soon.

Several birds tested positive for West Nile virus in 2004, including the state’s first positive bird from Gooding County. Idaho tests dead magpies, crows, jays, and raptors, such as red tail hawks, as well as surveys mosquito populations for the virus. West Nile virus has a high mortality rate among these birds, and most states have discovered the virus in their states through dead bird testing.

In all, Idaho tested 152 dead birds between February and December 2004. The birds met the criteria for testing, which includes being dead less than 48 hours and members of the corvid (crows, magpies, ravens, and jays) and raptor (hawks, owls, and eagles) families. In 2004, seven positive birds were identified, including one each in Gooding and Jerome counties, and the remainder from Elmore, Ada, Canyon, and Washington counties.

In 2004, Health District offices across Idaho also placed mosquito traps in strategic locations in their regions. Four traps were placed in Twin Falls, Gooding, Minidoka, and Blaine counties. A total of 1,690 mosquito pools were tested from around the state in 2004, but no positive mosquitoes were found. Mosquitoes become infected with the virus when they bite birds carrying the disease. The disease is then transmitted to humans and horses by mosquitoes.

Most human infections of West Nile virus are mild or have no symptoms. Approximately 20 percent of those infected develop West Nile fever, a generally mild fever that lasts from 3 to

6 days and begins from 3 to 14 days after infection. Symptoms often include fever and headache, muscle aches, tiredness, nausea and vomiting, eye pain, skin rash, and enlarged lymph nodes.

Less than one percent of people infected develop the serious neurological disease called West Nile encephalitis. Blood tests are available through the State Laboratory for those with neurological symptoms, and require two blood samples three weeks apart for confirmation of West Nile virus. Those over age 50 are more susceptible to serious complications from the virus.

The Idaho State Laboratory is discouraging blood tests for those people with mild fevers and flu-like symptoms. People are encouraged to consult their health care provider if they have concerns about their health.

Frodin advises people to insect proof their homes and reduce standing water on their property that might provide breeding habitat for mosquitoes. Other tips include:

- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors. Wear long sleeves, light-colored, and loose-fitting clothes.
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children.
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk.
- Empty birdbaths and clean decorative ponds every three to six days. It is also important to eliminate mosquito-breeding areas such as clogged rain gutters, old tires, and other items that contain standing water.
- Report dead birds to the local Fish and Game office in Jerome.

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